Lone-Parent Women

A significant and ever-increasing number of Saskatchewan women are heading lone-parent families.

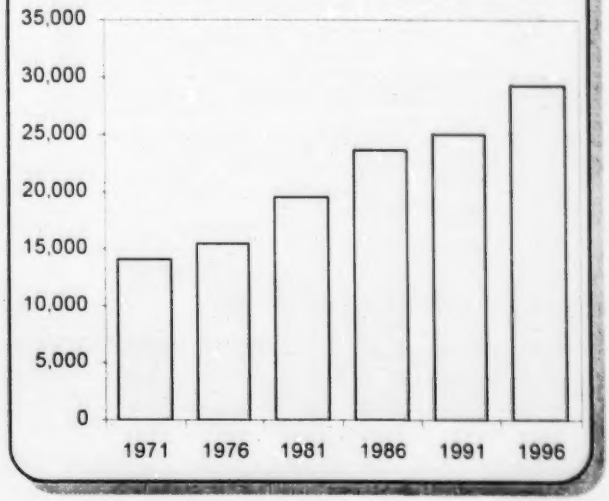
- In 1996, there were 34,930 lone-parent families in Saskatchewan and the vast majority (84%) were headed by a woman.
- Lone-parent families headed by a woman represent 11% of Saskatchewan families.
- Together with their children, lone-parent women constitute 8% of the population.

Much of the reliable statistical information about lone-parent women is available from the Statistics Canada Census, conducted every five years. Additional data on income and labour force activity are available from the Labour Force Survey and the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics. All of these sources are used in this statistical update. The statistics in this paper generally report on the number of lone-parent families[1] rather than the number of individuals in these families.

The definition of a lone-parent family varies slightly among data sources. In the 1996 Census and earlier years, a family was considered a lone-parent family if there was one or more single (that is, never-married) children living with only one of their parents. The children could be the woman's natural or adopted children, or step children. (The data on income presented later in this statistical update removes the marriage restriction on the children, and provides an upper age limit of 25 years for the children and 65 years for the lone-parent.)

As Figure 1 shows, the number of lone-parent families headed by women is increasing in the province. From 1971 to 1996, the number of families led by lone-parent women has more than doubled. Although the 108% increase over the 25 years is substantial, it is lower than the increase in Canada as a whole (155%) or in most other provinces. More recent data from the Labour Force Survey suggests that the number of lone-parent women may have stabilized since 1996.

Figure 1: Lone-Parent Families Headed by Women, Saskatchewan, 1971 to 1996

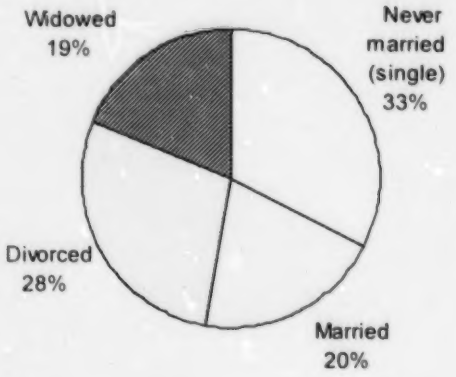


Marital Status

One-third of lone-parent women had never been legally married (see Figure 2). The remaining two-thirds were either currently married with an absent spouse, divorced, or widowed.

From 1986 to 1996, the proportion of lone-parent women who were single or divorced increased. The proportion of women who were still married but were living as lone-parents declined. The proportion of lone-parent women who were widowed also declined.

Figure 2: Marital Status (legal) of Lone-Parent Women, Saskatchewan, 1996



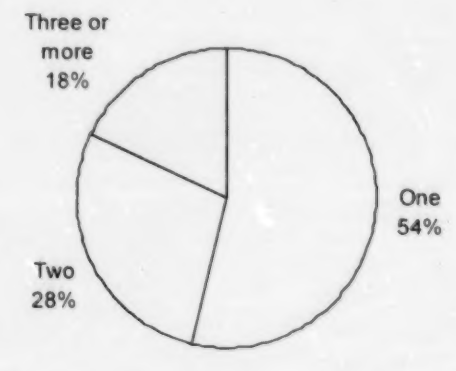
Age of Lone-Parent Women and Their Children

A majority (54%) of lone-parent women have one child at home. Eighteen percent of lone-parent women have three or more children at home (see Figure 3).

Children's need for supervision and their participation in school and recreational opportunities varies by age. The age of the children in lone-parent families headed by women is shown in Figure 5.

In 30% of the households there is at least one child less than six years old. All of the children are less than 15 years of age in 51% of households.

Figure 3: Number of Children in Lone-Parent Families Headed by Women, Saskatchewan, 1996



At least 14% of the households have an older child that is 15 to 17 years of age. Thirty-six percent of the households have a child that is 18 years or older; in 28% the children are all 18 years of age or older.

Figure 4: Age of Children in Lone-Parent Families Headed by Women, Saskatchewan, 1996

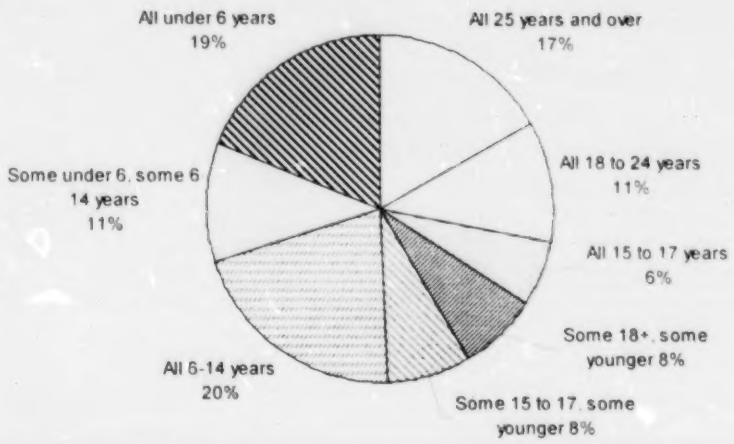
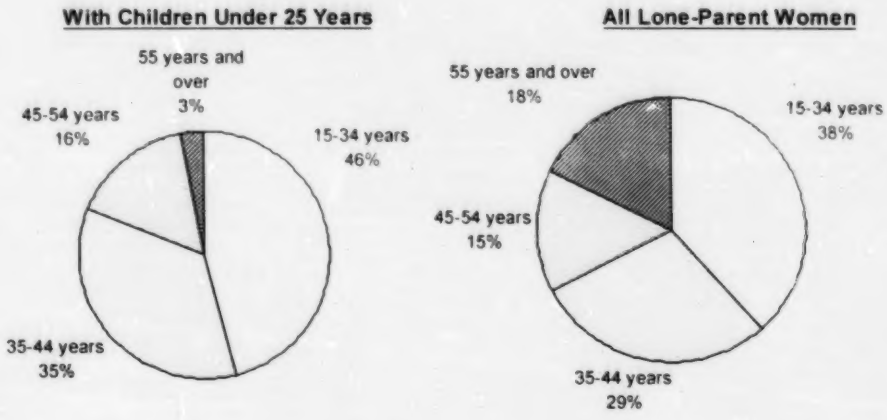


Figure 5 indicates that 67% of all lone-parents are less than 45 years of age. Lone-parent mothers with children under the age of 25 are younger - 81% are less than 45 years old.

Figure 5: Age Group for Lone-Parent Women, Saskatchewan, 1996

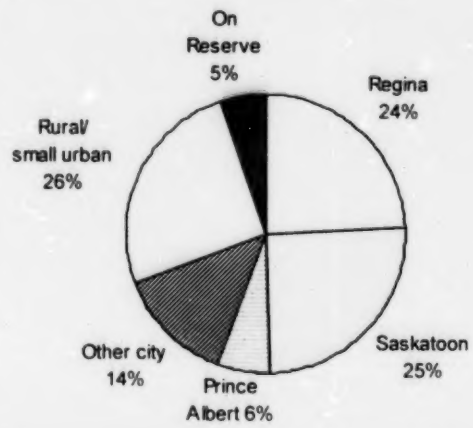


Other data indicates that 73% of lone-parent women who are 15 to 34 years of age have at least one child under the age of six. Older women have older children - for 86% of lone-parent women aged 55 and older, all of the children who are living at home are 25 years of age or older.

Residence

Proportionately more lone-parent women lived in Saskatchewan's larger urban centres in 1996. As Figure 6 shows, almost one-half lived in either Regina or Saskatoon, and 70% live in one of Saskatchewan's 12 cities.

Figure 6: Residence for Families of Lone-Parent Women,1996



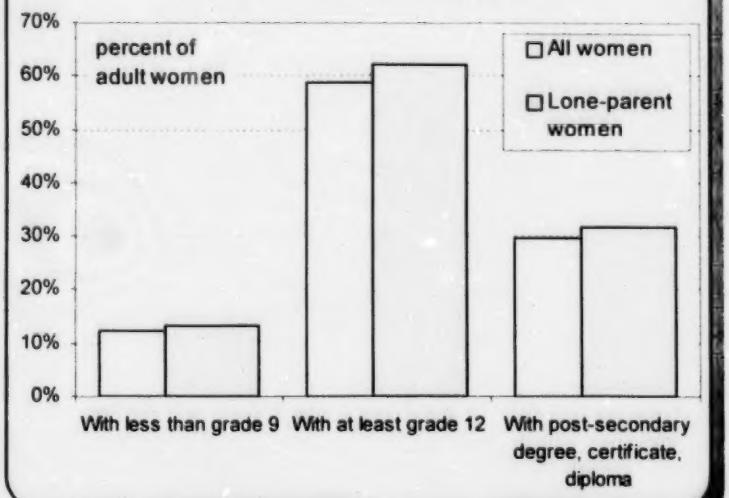
Education

There are two sources for information about the education level and educational activity of Saskatchewan's lone-parent women. The 1996 Census is the most comprehensive and the most reliable. The second source is the monthly Labour Force Survey (LFS). Although the LFS is more up-to-date, it excludes the significant portion of lone-parent women who live on Reserve[2].

The Census reports that lone-parent women have equivalent levels of completed education when compared with other women. For example, 62% have at least a Grade 12 education compared with 59% of all Saskatchewan women; and 32% have a post-secondary education compared with 30% of all Saskatchewan women.

The different age structure of lone-parent women will affect these statistics somewhat. The general population of women in the province is, on average, older than the population of lone-parent women and older women tend to have lower levels of formal education.

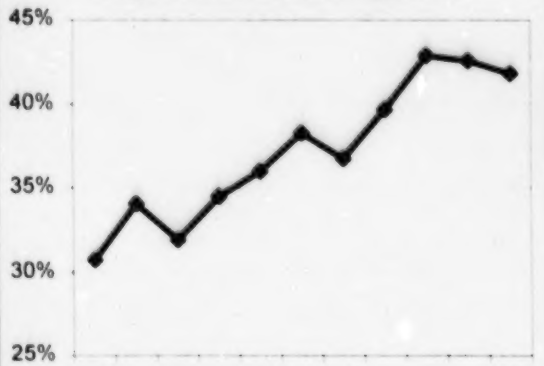
Figure 7: Completed Education for Saskatchewan Women, 1996



The Labour Force Survey (LFS) shows slightly different proportions of completed education, but it suggests that the trend in formal education levels among lone-parent women is increasing (see Figure 8). The proportion of lone-parent women with a post-secondary education has increased from 31% in 1990 to 42% in 2000.

The LFS also reports that an average of 11% of lone-parent women were attending school during the year 2000.

Figure 8: Proportion of Lone-Parent Women with a Post-Secondary Degree, Certificate, or Diploma



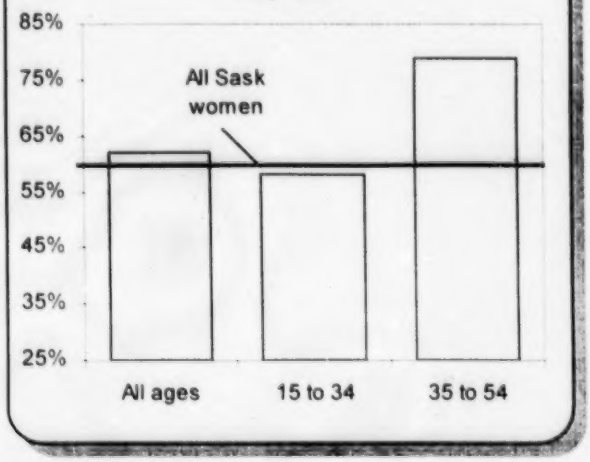
Employment

Among all lone-parent women, the 1996 labour force participation rate[3] was 62%, slightly higher than the rate of 60% for all Saskatchewan women (see Figure 9).

Overall, lone-parent women were more likely to be working full-time – 78% of lone-parents worked full-time compared with 70% of all Saskatchewan women.

However, employment patterns vary by age. Among lone-parent women under 35 years of age, the participation rate was 58%; while for those 35 to 54, it was 79%. The participation rate for the younger lone-parent women is lower than the Saskatchewan average and lower than the average for that age group.

Figure 9: Labour Force Participation Rates for Lone-Parent Women in May 1996

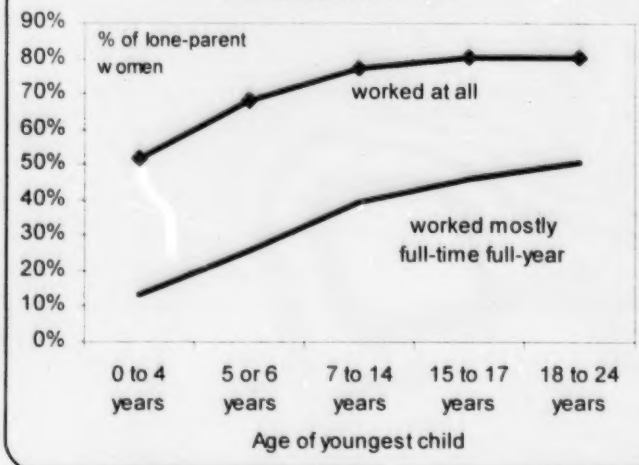


The lower labour force participation rate occurs among younger women whose children are typically younger or preschool age and need more hours of child care. The lack of a spouse at home, or perhaps even nearby, to share in child care responsibilities, is one factor affecting labour force participation options.

The Census asked respondents about their employment in the week prior to Census Day, which was May 14, 1996. This information is shown in Figure 9. To get a picture of employment patterns over a year, the Census asked respondents about the number of weeks they worked and whether they worked full-time or part-time in the year prior to the Census, which is in this case, 1995. That information is shown in Figure 10.

The strong relationship between the age of the children and labour force activity is indicated in Figure 10, showing the proportion of lone-parent women who were employed for at least some part of 1995.

Figure 10: Employment in 1995 for Lone-Parent Women



In 1995, just over 50% of lone-parent women with very young children at home worked in the paid labour force. Thirteen percent worked in a full-time job throughout the year. However, as the age of the youngest child increases, the attachment to the labour force increases steadily.

Many lone-parent families have two family members working. Among the lone-parent families headed by a woman, 21% had at least one (older) child and the lone-parent woman in the labour force.

Other differences between lone-parent women and all Saskatchewan women are evident from the Labour Force Survey data.

- More of those who are working part-time are doing so involuntarily – 17% of lone-parent women working part-time report that they would rather have full-time work, compared with 5% of all women.
- Four out of ten lone-parent women have been in their current job for five or more years. The equivalent percentage among all women is 48%.
- Lone-parent women in paid positions earn an average of $12.60 per hour, compared with $13.00 per hour for all women.

The Labour Force Survey suggests that, after adjusting for age, the labour force participation rates among lone-parent women have not changed appreciably in the 1990s.

Industry and Occupation

The following data for employment by industry and occupation is based on the Labour Force Survey annual averages for the year 2000.

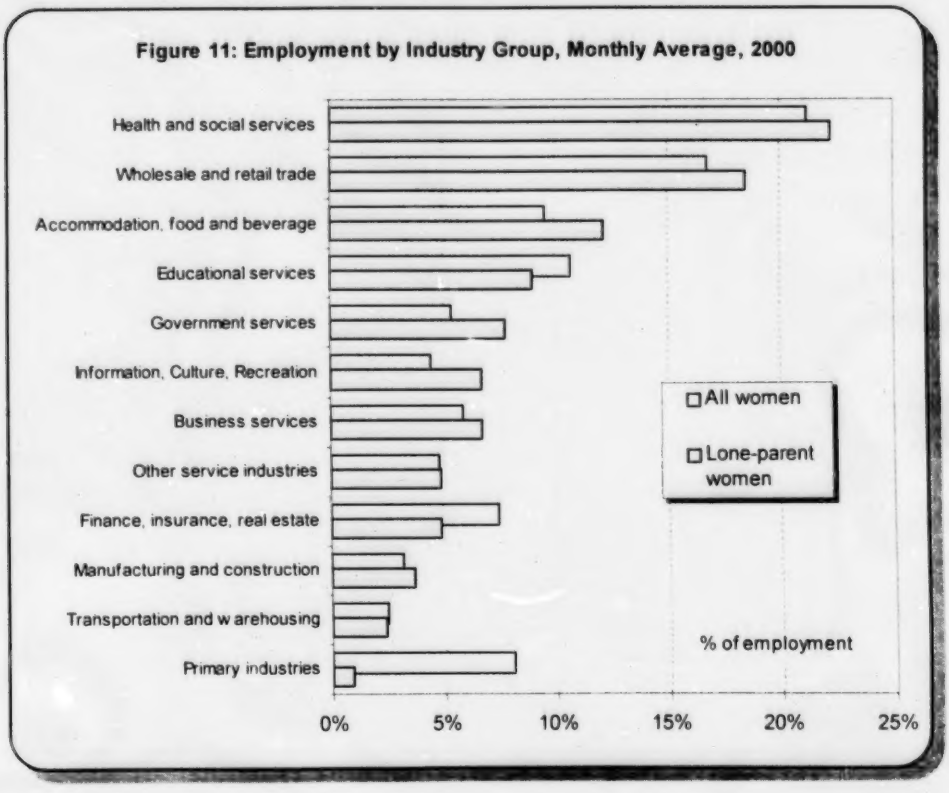
Employment by Industry and Occupation

Statistics for employment in industry and occupation groups require careful interpretation. The industry group refers to the type of business in which the person is employed, whereas the occupation group refers to their duties. Many occupation groups cross industry boundaries. In the retail trade industry group, for example, there are people in managerial occupations, as well as people in sales occupations and service occupations.

Lone-parent women are less likely than other Saskatchewan women to be working in three industry groups (see Figure 11):

- primary industries including farming, mining, and the oil and gas sector, where 1% of lone-parents work compared with 8% of all women;
- the finance, insurance, real estate group (5% compared with 7%); and
- educational services (9% compared with 11%).

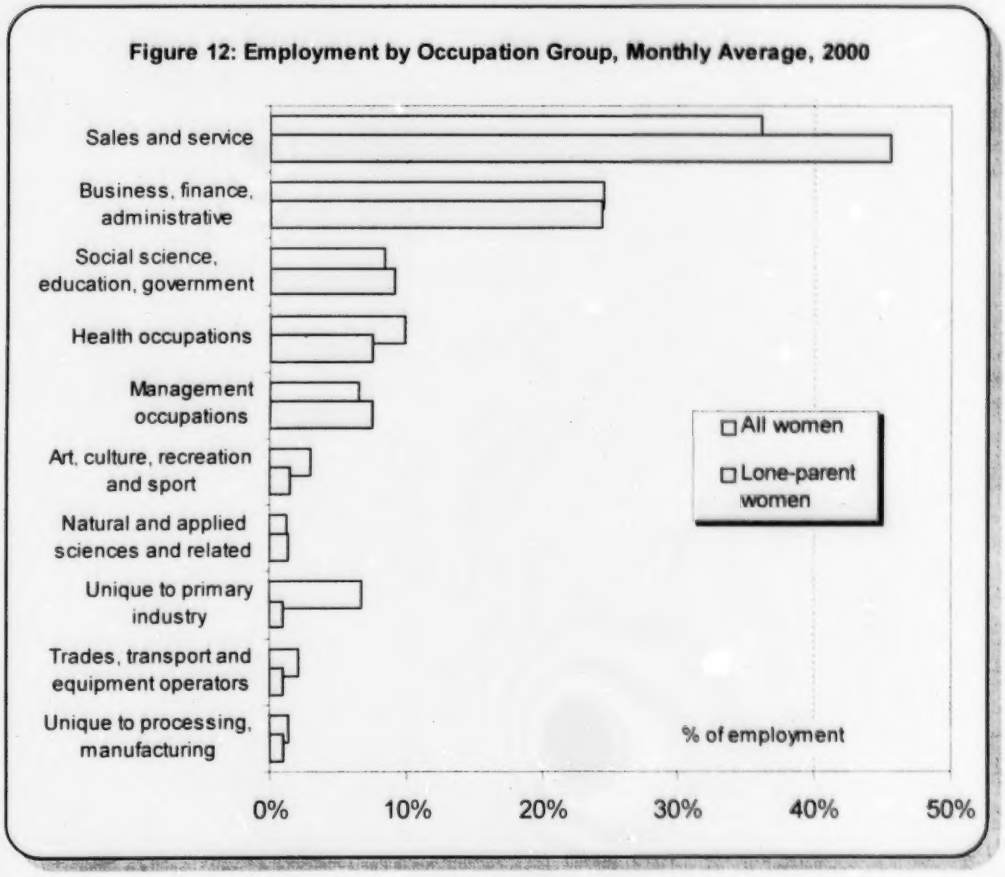
Figure 11: Employment by Industry Group, Monthly Average, 2000



Lone-parent women are more likely than other women to be working in most other industry groups, including:

- health and social services (22% compared with 21%);
- wholesale and retail trade (18% compared to 17%);
- accommodation, food and beverage services (12% compared with 10%);
- government services (8% compared with 5%); and
- the information, culture and recreation group (7% compared with 4%).

Figure 12: Employment by Occupation Group, Monthly Average, 2000



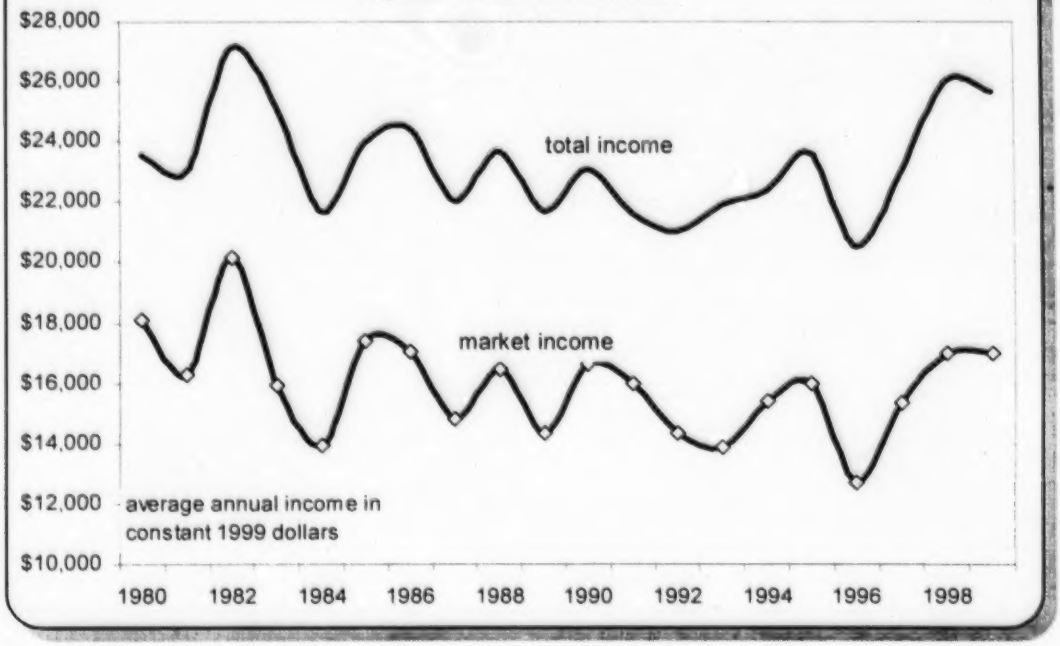
On an occupational level, working lone-parent women are more evenly spread across occupation groups with two exceptions (see Figure 12). They are much more likely to be working in sales and service occupations, and much less likely to be working in occupations unique to the primary industry, a category that includes farmers.

Income

The income statistics used here are derived from Statistics Canada's Income Trends in Canada CDROM[4]. The annual averages used are:

- for gross annual income before taxes and other deductions; and
- adjusted for inflation – that is, they are measured in constant 1999 dollars.

Figure 13: Average Family Income for Lone-Parent Families Headed by Women, Saskatchewan



In 1999, families headed by lone-parent women had an average income near $26,000 (see Figure 13)[5]. From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, average income fluctuated near $22,000 after adjusting for inflation. Even with the recent increase, 1999 incomes have the same purchasing power as incomes in the early 1980s.

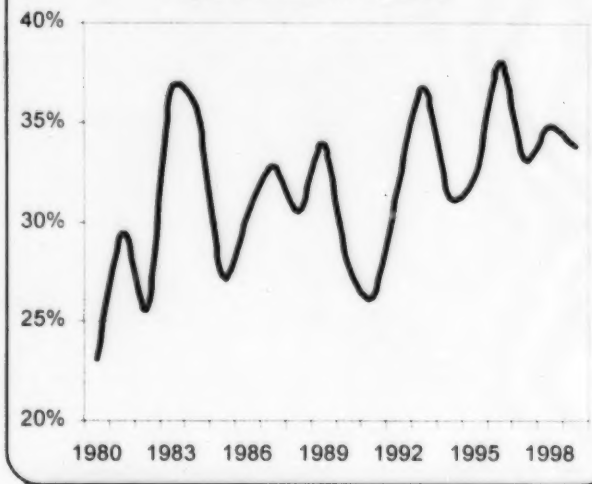
Market income, which was on a general downward trend, reached $16,980 in 1999. As with total income, market incomes adjusted for inflation have only now returned to the level experienced in the early 1980s.

Market Income

Market income refers to income from employment, including: self-employment; income from investments and private pension plans; and other income, such as: rental income; alimony and child support; scholarships; and retirement allowances.

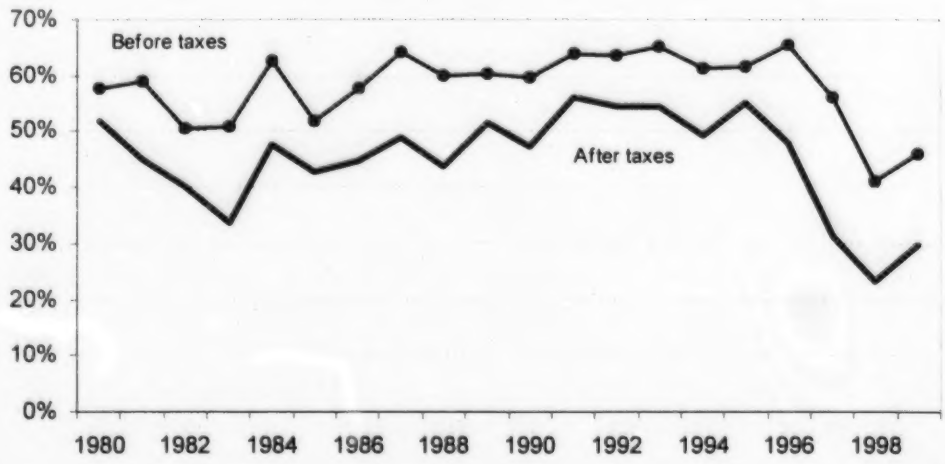
Government transfers make up the difference between market income and total income. This category includes, for example: social assistance; employment insurance; disability benefits; Canada Pension Plan; Old Age Security and Workers' Compensation benefits. On average, 34% of family income for lone-parent women in 1999 came from government transfers, compared with 6% for two-parent families with children (see Figure 14). The proportion of income from these transfers has fluctuated annually, but has been on an upward trend since 1980.

Figure 14: Proportion of Income from Government Transfers, Families Headed by Lone-Parent Women



Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) is a measure of income inequality. The proportion of lone-parent women who head families with incomes below the LICO increased to 65% in 1996, then fell in 1997 and 1998 (see Figure 15). The proportion increased slightly to 46% in 1999.[6]

Figure 15: Proportion of Families Headed by Lone-Parent Women with Income below the Low Income Cut-Off



Low Income Cut-Off (LICO)

The LICO is the income level below which a family would be expected to spend an above-average portion of their income on basic necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter. For example, the 1999 LICO for a city the size of Regina or Saskatoon was $15,341 for a person living alone and $23,849 for a family of three. In a rural area, the LICO for a person living alone would be $12,361, and for a family of three would be $19,216.

Notes

Source: The majority of these data are derived from the 1996 Statistics Canada Census. The family status is determined from the main Census questionnaire, whereas most of the socioeconomic characteristics such as employment, education and income, are from the "long form" of the Census so they are, in effect, based on a 20% sample of households. Only persons living in private dwellings receive the long form, so these statistics exclude those living in so-called "collective" dwellings including, for example, prisons, special care homes, hotels, homes for people with disabilities, and group homes.

1. *The data refer to what is called a "census family" by Statistics Canada. A Census family is defined as "a now-married couple (with or without never-married sons and/or daughters of either or both spouses), a couple living common-law (with or without never-married sons and/or daughters of either or both partners) or a lone-parent of any marital status, with at least one never-married son or daughter living in the same dwelling."*

2. *For a variety of reasons, including jurisdictional issues, costs and response rates, the Labour Force Survey framework excludes the population normally resident on Reserve. The survey includes the Aboriginal population living off Reserve in its survey frame.*

3. *The "participation rate" is the percentage of the adult population (15 years of age and older) that is in the labour force, that is, either employed or unemployed.*

4. *The catalogue number for the CDROM is #13F0022XCB. It is a compilation of income data from the Survey of Consumer Finances and the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics. Because these surveys use the same sample "frame" as the Labour Force Survey, they also exclude the population on Indian Reserves.*

5. *Issues have been raised about the way Statistics Canada imputed some government transfer income for respondents who did not report their actual income on the survey. The 1997 and 1998 government transfer figures may somewhat overstate actual transfers for some low income households.*

6. *The reasons for this dramatic change are unclear. Not only did the rate drop, but it dropped more quickly than in other provinces. The sample size is sufficient to meet Statistics Canada's criteria for acceptable estimates. But, the small Saskatchewan sample creates standard errors that are higher than those of other provinces, so the real income levels could be somewhat higher or lower than the estimates. Also, if a large number of lone-parent women had incomes just below the LICO, a small change in income could have moved them above the LICO. Another possible reason for the drop is the downward trend in the proportion of lone-parent women with preschool aged children. – labour market participation is higher among women whose youngest child is six years of age or older. The educational attainment of lone-parent women has also increased. Changes to social policies, combined with a stronger economy, are important factors that should also be considered for their impact on the income of Saskatchewan lone-parent women.*

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